

Dare to be **Pure**

1 Corinthians 5

The “church” has had lots of media exposure lately - not much of it positive. Thinking back over the last few months, what issues can you recall?

What perception do you think people have of Christians and Christianity at the moment?

If you haven't been in touch with the media lately, here are some examples...

Protestant ministers face own sex scandals

By Larry Witham
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The evangelical newsmagazine World responded to the sexual-abuse crisis among Catholic clergy with a recent cover story advising "parental discretion" and warning readers of "offensive material." But Catholic priests were not the subject. "The Protestant church has a severe problem of its own: some pastoral counsellors having sex with counsellees," World reported. Reports suggest that while most Catholic cases involve homosexual priests latching onto young boys, Protestant cases tend to be ministers preying on women. "What's striking about this is that Catholics are not alone," said the Rev. John Lundin, a Lutheran pastor and chairman of the Interfaith Sexual Trauma Institute. "It's not just children, it's also adults."

Letters to the Editor Sydney Morning Herald May 10, 2002

Christianity's problem is that Christians take it upon themselves to alienate so many people. Christians are sanctimonious about drug use, for example, but not a single word of their preaching is directed at cars or guns, both of which leave drugs way behind in the race to cause social and economic damage. Christians claim to support marriage and the family, but they try to cover up child abuse within the churches, and they stay silent about the adulteries of future church leaders like Prince Charles. When some scandal or other breaks out, they try to do nothing about it....

What's gone wrong? Put simply, it seems to the outside observer that for “the church”, anything goes! Recently, both here in Australia, and in the USA, one of the biggest issues has been that those in authority have done nothing about the problems even when they've known about them! At the same time, there's still the perception that Christians want to tell the world how to live morally. On the one hand we seem to want to tell the world how to be good... and on the other hand, we fail to even live up to the world's standards! The situation is much the same in 1 Corinthians 5. But Paul isn't just speaking about Christian leaders misbehaving. There are warnings here for **every Christian**. And it's not about Christian leaders failing to take action. It's about a **Christian church** that no longer cares... that's no longer shocked by anything.

Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-8.

1. What has Paul heard, and why is it particularly embarrassing? (v1)
2. What's wrong with the Corinthian reaction? (v2, 6)
3. “*Handing the man over to Satan*” sounds both severe and spooky. But what does Paul actually mean them to do? (See verses 2, 7 and 11)
4. What is Paul's intention in doing this...
 - a) for the man involved?
 - b) for the Corinthian church?
5. In what ways would this sort of “yeast” work its way through the whole batch of dough? Have you ever seen this happen?

6. The *Passover* was a Jewish festival celebrated by sacrificing a lamb, whose sprinkled blood protected the homes of God's people, and by eating bread made without yeast. Can you put Paul's point in v7-8 in plain English?

Read verses 9 to 12. Clearly, Paul has a strong sense of the difference there should be between people “of the world” and those who claim to be our brothers and sisters.

7. What attitude should we have to mixing with people “of the world”? Is it our job to criticise their immorality?

8. Who, then, are we meant to avoid mixing with?

List the particular lifestyle choices that Paul says are not fitting for Christians.

It may seem inconsistent Paul says we're free to mix with non-Christians who are immoral, greedy idol worshippers... but if there's a so-called Christian living like that, we're to avoid them. Don't associate with them, says Paul... don't even eat with them. According to his logic in verses 12 and 13, we're to cast a critical eye over those inside the church before we ever dream of judging those outside. And yet so often, Christians have done the exact reverse!

Living it...

How can we, as a church, be serious about Paul's instructions to us here?

How would you react if you heard that someone had been asked not to come to church because of their immoral living?

What may some people find uncomfortable about this idea?

Those who *claim to be Christians* should be serious about living lives of *sincerity and truth* rather than *malice and wickedness*. Those who don't yet call themselves Christian brothers and sisters should see something remarkably different and attractive about Christians. If there's immorality among us that outranks even the pagans (v1) then what witness is left to the world? That's exactly the question that's facing Christianity today as we are tried and found lacking by the world's media.

That makes it all the more essential that we as individuals (and together as a church) are serious about encouraging one another in godliness... and never turn a “blind eye” to immorality within our church. Leaders, especially, must be held accountable.

Tough Questions

Back in chapter 4, Paul told the Corinthians not to judge. Now he wants them to. Isn't that inconsistent?

Jesus mixed and ate with “sinners” and even prostitutes. Is Paul contradicting Jesus?

A happy footnote...

In 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, Paul talks about restoring to fellowship a brother who has sinned and been removed from the church probably the same person mentioned here in 1 Corinthians 5. Paul says, “Now... you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed... I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.”

Where to get help

If you've been in the terrible situation of having been betrayed sexually by a Christian leader either in this church or otherwise you need to know that there's somewhere you can turn for help. Contact Lorraine Pfeffer on 38551977. She's a trained counsellor, a committed Christian, and an outside contact point.